

2014 State of the City Address

Mayor Gregory A. Ballard

February 27, 2014

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Dr. Manuel, Madam President, Members of the Council, friends and fellow citizens of Indianapolis, I never tire of seeing beautiful pictures of our city... especially when there is not any snow on the ground.

I also, of course, want to acknowledge my wonderful wife, Winnie, for being a great partner, first lady of our city, and the woman who keeps the snow clear from our sidewalks and driveway.

Indy is such a special place. You see it in the smile of a family enjoying one of our parks, best friends dining out at one of our new restaurants, and people biking to work on a new trail. Indy is a great place to work. It is a great place to visit. It is the place many of us were raised. And, it is the place I want your children and their children to call home.

The state of our city is strong. Indy is positioned for tremendous growth. The challenge before us right now is to maximize that growth. Somewhere in the world there is a ten-year old who will grow up to create a business that will employ thousands and change the world in ways we can't conceive of today. I want that young person to see Indy as the type of place he or she wants to live so when they start that business, they do it here.

Tonight, I want to outline a way forward for our city to ensure that future generations choose to "Live Indy."

Momentum is on our side. Cities across America are experiencing an urban revival. It is no longer a forgone conclusion that people will move to the suburbs and commute back to the city. A growing number of people are choosing to live local, shop local, and eat local. They want access to an authentic urban lifestyle and they want it right outside their front door.

Indy has great energy right now. About two-and-a-half years ago Cara Dafforn opened a small stand in the City Market to sell soup mixes featuring locally grown vegetables and herbs. Now, her U-Relish Farm products have appeared on NBC's Parks and Recreation. Cara received permission to sell a soup mix called "Pawnee Chickpea." And, you can buy her mixes in three local Kroger stores with plans to go statewide by the end of next year. This is the latest in a growing string of success stories emerging from our revitalized City Market and we need more of those stories.

Three decades ago our city made a commitment to turn our downtown into a model of urban development, and clearly it is working. About 20% of all the jobs in Indy and 4% of every job in the state are located downtown. We are adding over 3,500 new residential units in the next few years. And, our

downtown was named the best in America two years in a row by Livability.com. National news outlets rank Indy as one of the most affordable places to live in America. The job before us is to also make Indy the most desirable.

For more than a year we have been developing measurable steps we can take to make this city an even better place to live, to work and to raise a family. These steps have come together to form the backbone of a strategic plan for the city's future. The central theme of that plan is "Live Indy." It is those two simple words that should drive all of our long-term decisions. Will an action make Indy a more attractive place to live or do business? Will it help us retain a person, a family or a business that already calls this great city home?

In the era of property tax caps and current state taxing policy, the future of our city will be determined by our ability to attract and retain residents. It is only through expanding our tax base that we will be able to maintain, and add to city services like police, fire, infrastructure, parks and neighborhood improvements.

No single initiative will be the silver bullet to achieving long-term fiscal sustainability. It will take determined leadership to turn this vision for the city into reality. I look forward to working with all stakeholders, but Indy cannot afford delay. We will use every tool available to ensure that Indy keeps building, keeps progressing and keeps moving forward.

No factor influences livability more than making sure people feel safe at work, in their neighborhood and in their home. Most of our neighborhoods are extremely safe, but there are some areas where we face considerable challenges, and I know a few high profile crimes have caused people to worry. These have been challenging times. After three consecutive years with fewer than 100 murders, 125 criminal homicides in 2013 deeply concern me. But, you should know that while the number of homicides increased we had fewer shootings, fewer break-ins, fewer rapes, and fewer aggravated assaults.

The men and women of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department are doing great work. They have made arrests in about three-quarters of the criminal homicides last year, which is well above the national average. They are also making major advancements in the use of technology. By the end of this year, everyone in the city will be able to see the latest public safety information about their neighborhood, in real-time, through our innovative "Safetown" system – which you can find at indy.safetown.org.

In addition to new systems, IMPD is also getting more manpower to make our community safer. We are moving more than 150 officers back on the street taking active police runs. My budget also adds 80 new police recruits this year alone. Some of those recruit candidates are here with us tonight. If they will please stand up, I am sure everyone wants to join me in wishing them our very best as they finish the hiring process and head to the academy.

This diverse new recruit class will help make our neighborhoods safer, but we need more men and women just like them. Our team already has a plan to replace the 150 officers expected to leave the force over the next three years, but we need to grow the force, not just tread water. This is not a difficult concept. We can add 100 more IMPD officers over the next three years, if the City can find a long-term way to pay for them. After three years of study, this is the time to eliminate the local homestead credit subsidy. For those homeowners not already at the 1% tax cap, it will cost, on average, less than two-dollars a month to hire more police officers. This is long past due.

Police, however, are not the public's only guardians. We need everyone in the community to help. Our strategic plan outlines a number of items to improve public safety in addition to hiring more officers. Things such as: improving analysis of crime data, building better re-entry programs for those being released from prison, and strengthening community partnerships to make neighborhoods safer.

It is also time for us to engage in some straight talk. This current pattern of violence is robbing us of an entire generation of young men of color and it must stop. I have been meeting with leaders in our African-American community for many months. There are no easy answers, but shortly we will announce a plan to address the many root causes of this violence. It will take more than just police. It will take a concerted effort by many to address everything from job training to parenting assistance. It will include community and church leaders, and mentors and role models who say enough is enough. Every life in our city matters.

While this effort will help some, others will simply continue make the wrong choices. For those individuals, we are aggressively pursuing changes in state law to hold them accountable. One of the main suspects in the brutal Northside home invasion should not have been on the streets. He had previously been sentenced to 16-years in prison, but got out before serving even three years. The man who shot nine people at Indiana Black Expo was sentenced to eight years but only served just over two. This is not acceptable. Now he sits in jail again.

I am asking our state lawmakers to stand with our police, make our city safer and pass my proposal to keep convicted gun criminals in prison longer. I want to thank Senators Jim Merritt and Mike Young for carrying this legislation for me. Criminals who use a gun while committing a crime need to serve a minimum of 20-years behind bars.

Safety in our neighborhoods is a top priority, but not our only priority. People also decide where to live based on proximity to high-quality schools. Every child has a fundamental right to an excellent education. This commitment begins with universal access to high-quality early childhood education programs. It continues with a K-12 system focused on access to high-quality schools of all types. And, ultimately blurs the line between high school, college, and a meaningful career.

This education system will enable every child in our city to define his or her life path and to ensure that Indianapolis thrives in the information age economy.

Children who grow up in poverty lag behind their more affluent peers before they enter the classroom. Early childhood education has been proven to level the playing field. My administration is committed to increasing access to quality early childhood education and providing parents with the information they need to pick the best option for their children. This year, my office plans to take several steps to advance early childhood education in our city.

First, the city is working to appropriate funds to participate in the State's early education grant program. These grants will support the expansion of early learning options in our city and ultimately enable more low-income 3 and 4 year olds to access top-notch programs.

Second, I am pleased to announce that Indy will be one of only three cities nationwide participating in a pilot with GreatSchools.org to add Pre-K information to our popular school chooser guide. This guide will provide parents information about more than 600 early childhood education centers in the city and help them make the best decision for their child.

Third, I have asked the Indy Chamber to lead a study quantifying the impact of early childhood education on our economy. This study will inform city and state leadership on the development of early childhood education policy.

These initiatives will help set children on a path to success. But, we must ensure that Indy has high-quality elementary and secondary schools that can build off that early progress. This means working together to increase the supply of quality schooling options irrespective of whether they are traditional public schools, such as Carl Wilde Elementary in IPS, public charter schools such as Herron High School or private schools, such as Cardinal Ritter High School.

Indy is fortunate to have bold new leaders like IPS Superintendent, Dr. Lewis Ferebee, who are embracing this shared philosophy that puts students first.

I promised two years ago to double the number of students served by high-quality public charter schools. We are meeting that commitment to the parents and the children of this community. Our 31 Mayor-sponsored charter schools now serve approximately 12,000 students and we have seven more schools on the way. The challenge before us now is to continue to find ways for schools of all types to better meet the needs of our children.

By 2016, nearly 80% of Indiana jobs will require middle or high-skilled workers. Unfortunately, too few workers in Indy have the level of education they need to compete. It is time we recalibrate our efforts to better prepare our workforce.

The City's VEX Robotics Championship engages our children in fields that continue to be a major provider of jobs. It is these kinds of educational programs that we, as a city, will continue to grow. Through the collective efforts of educators, corporations, and the philanthropic community, Indy now

hosts the largest city-wide VEX robotics competition in the nation. The 2013 Championship at Banker's Life Fieldhouse brought together nearly 100 middle and high school teams in an epic robot battle royale!

I am pleased to welcome our champions from Speedway Junior High and Franklin Central High School tonight. Each student on the F-C robotics team will receive a \$40,000 scholarship to Rose-Hulman, and a chance to compete for the international title in California later this year.

In the future, we must cultivate a new generation of skilled employees. This requires that we develop new educational models, like Ben Davis University High School or the innovative polytechnic schools that are showing early signs of success around the nation. By rethinking the way we educate and prepare our work force, we will be better positioned to lead in the information age economy.

A strong, holistic education system will improve the lives of children and families in our city. Our goal is simple - in Indy, a child's potential will not be limited by their parents' income or zip code.

As we build and invest in the things that make people want to "Live Indy", it is important we remember that Indy is a collection of unique neighborhoods. It is our job to connect them and promote them as great places to live.

Our strategic plan will help our neighborhoods attract and retain jobs and residents. We turned the Old Bush Stadium into the anchor for 16 Tech. New and affordable housing now stand at the dilapidated Keystone Towers and Winona Hospital locations. New schools, a community center and housing are transforming the Avondale-Meadows area. The Old Central State Hospital site near Haughville, USA has new apartments, and a school and park are on the way.

For years people thought the city would never fix things in Martindale-Brightwood, Wanamaker, the Meadows, Crooked Creek or Martin Luther King Drive, but we did and there is more to come.

Last August, we announced a bi-partisan plan to invest up to \$350 million in neighborhood streets, sidewalks, bridges, parks and trails. This plan to continue Rebuild Indy uses new transportation money coming to us from the state and invests it in our neighborhoods right now. It is not a radical concept. Many other mayors, including my predecessor Mayor Peterson, used this exact same funding model. It is time to get Rebuild Indy 2 going again so we can invest in our neighborhoods.

Rebuild Indy 2 will allow us to build sidewalks to keep children safe. It will allow us to resurface every road in the city that needs it most. It will repair bridges, build new trails and upgrade parks. Ultimately, it will allow us to improve the places where people live and work without raising taxes. The State has given us this money for this expressed purpose. We simply need to act to ensure it gets done.

Beginning next week and continuing over the next several months, I will host town hall meetings throughout the city to show people how Rebuild Indy 2 will benefit their neighborhood. Now is the time to say yes to more sidewalks, yes to better streets, and yes to making Indy a better place to live.

Great neighborhoods are comprised of great people and great institutions. Here on the near Southside that institution is UIndy. In the last few years, the City has been working with the university to invest nearly \$10 million in streets, sidewalks, and bike lanes. The change is remarkable. Tonight, I am pleased to say the city will also contribute an additional \$1 million in community development funds to UIndy's plan for a new health center and University Heights Park. These projects are part of a five-year, \$50 million investment the university is making to enhance its growth and make this area more attractive for people to live.

A few weeks ago, Richard Florida wrote an article in *The Atlantic Cities* magazine about what entrepreneurs want when looking for a place to start a business. "Talent" ranked number one -- and words such as "live," "parks," "schools" and "restaurants" all ranked near the top of the list. It is clear what successful entrepreneurs want: a high quality of life.

Make no mistake, Indy is a low tax city and it will remain that way -- but the battle for the future of American cities will be won by the place that attracts and retains talent. We must invest in those things that make our neighborhoods more attractive. So, we are dedicating \$5 million to improve Tarkington Park in the Midtown area. These new improvements will include basketball courts, an outdoor performance stage, concessions, and a spray park. It will be funded through Rebuild Indy, the Parks Foundation, and revenue generated by a new mixed-use development in Broad Ripple.

This is a great example of using growth and development in one area to help neighborhoods elsewhere. In the end, these park improvements will lead to new growth around Tarkington Park; and the Broad Ripple development will bring new residents, new retail and new energy to that great neighborhood.

Moving forward, Indy must keep investing in new living options, parks, streets and other amenities to keep our current population here, and attract new residents. Quite simply, I want people to have a difficult time choosing between our many great neighborhoods.

Our plan also fills a gap that many did not realize existed. Indy is blessed to have great organizations promoting our sports industry, our downtown, our businesses and tourism; but, believe it or not, there is not a group out there promoting the city as a place to live.

In order for people to "Live Indy," they must hear about our city and its great neighborhoods. I assembled the leaders of many community organizations and asked them to build a strategy that promotes all that Indy has to offer. I want them to help us tell Indy's story, to promote our great neighborhoods and to develop a plan to compete for residents. We may be the only major city in America where you can choose between living in a downtown high rise, an urban or suburban house, or even a farm all inside the city limits. Indy offers every type of living a person could want and it is time more people know about it.

In addition to safe neighborhoods and good schools, residents also gravitate to places where they can start a business or get a job. In that respect, Indy is again making tremendous progress. The unemployment rate in Indy dropped by 2.3% in the last year alone.

Indy is the economic engine of this region and the entire state. It is among the top places for company relocations and expansions, but we must also help small businesses and start-ups. *Kiplinger* ranks Indy as the 7th best city to start a business. Our plan outlines steps to give those small businesses a better chance to succeed. And, later this year our partners at the Indy Chamber and Develop Indy will launch the Business Acceleration Team. This initiative, modeled after a successful program in New York, will be a one-stop shop for small business. Many times small businesses don't know where to turn for help. This team will help provide the answers.

We are also actively looking for partners and a location to open a new business incubator downtown. Business incubators help start-ups share knowledge, creativity and overhead. We already have great incubators in Indy's Kitchen and Developer Town. We need to build on those successes and replicate the model throughout the city.

And finally, we must help our small businesses expand their reach worldwide. Indy was selected by the prestigious Brookings Institute for a program that helps local companies market their goods and services around the world. If we don't connect ourselves to the global economy, we will not be competitive. This new Global Indy initiative will help local companies penetrate the world marketplace and show international companies why they need to open offices here.

Indy needs to be seen as a global city. It is critical for our economic future and it is critical to attract people to "Live Indy." In this new era of urbanism, people want to fill their lives with the colors and flavors of the entire world.

Almost everyone knows about the 500 Festival and the Indiana Black Expo Summer Celebration. But did you know we also host more than 70 other international and cultural festivals throughout the year? The Chinese Festival attracts more than 5,000 people. Our Sister Cities Festival brought 4,500 people downtown. India Day welcomes more than a thousand people. And, who can actually count all the people who descend on Irish Fest, German Fest, Indy Fringe, the Indiana Latino Expo and the Italian Street Festival.

Indy is coming alive with a new global spirit.

Many people, especially young people, want to live near places where they can experience something not found anywhere else. So, our strategic plan continues the city's support for art, nature and raising the level of architecture in the city.

Simply put, Indy must raise its game. We need more signature structures that define our skyline. The new, curved MSA tower is modern and inspiring. The new Mass Ave development contains a digital art screen that will draw people's attention.

IndyGo's new Downtown Transit Center definitely fits that mold. This sleek building will not only transform an empty parking lot, but also serve as the hub for transit. Just imagine people waiting inside for a bus connection with coffee and a newspaper, rather than huddled outside on Ohio Street in the cold. IndyGo will be showcasing these designs and much more starting tomorrow at Old City Hall. I encourage you to come take a look because there are many people who can't wait for this new transit center to open next year.

In more ways than just transit, Indy is a city on the move. We are receiving national and international praise for innovation in infrastructure, water, parking and electric vehicles – as well as amenities like bike lanes, the airport and the cultural trail. The Indianapolis Prize for animal conservation is the most prestigious program of its kind, and our international violin competition ranks among the best in the world.

There are many great things taking place across this city and even more are on the horizon. Our plan for the future includes dozens of ideas to make our city a safer place, improve our schools, invest in our neighborhoods, attract new jobs and find that "X" factor that makes people want to choose Indy as a place to plant their roots.

We have discussed many of the plan's big ideas tonight, but there is one more important item we have not touched upon yet – and that is you. I was very pleased the *New York Times* listed Indy as one of the 52 places to see in the world in 2014. It is great publicity. But to be honest, I was a little disappointed some of our own residents seemed surprised by it. Don't be. Indy is a great place.

Sure, we face problems like other big cities, but we are a great city nonetheless. Every time I meet someone who is visiting for the first time, they say "they never knew how great Indy is." We need to make sure more people know. We need to make sure our own people know. I know Hoosiers are humble, but be proud Indy. Be proud. Be determined to make the next decade in our city better than the last. And, be an ambassador for all things that make Indy a great place to live, to work and to raise a family.

Thank you.

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